

Bachelor's thesis

Performing Arts/ Music

Musician - Violin

2018

Ilayda Zeynep Köksal

A. THESIS CONCERT

– Duo concert 24.2.2017, Chricton hall

B. STAGE FRIGHT

– What is Stage Fright & How can a performing musician deal with it

Ilayda Zeynep Köksal

A. THESIS CONCERT DUO CONCERT, 24.2.2017, CHRICTON-HALL

B. STAGE FRIGHT - What is Stage Fright and how can a performing musician to manage it

This thesis consists of two parts, the artistic and the written part.

The Artistic part is thesis concert which was a Duo Concert 24Th February 2017, Crichton Concert Hall, Turku Finland

In the Written part, stage fright situation and the question about how to handle it are discussed. This subject applies to all performing artists. The main object is to increase performance musicians' awareness of this problem in order to help those who have this kind of fear. The reasons which cause the stage fright and ways how one can manage with the problem are explained.

KEYWORDS:

Anxiety, Stage Fright, Performance Anxiety

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Ilayda Zeynep Köksal

ESIINTYMISPELKO

- miten esiintyvä muusikko voi toimia esiintymispelon kanssa?

Tämä opinnäytetyö on kaksiosainen. Taiteellinen osio on opinnäytekonsertti, joka oli Duo-konsertti 24.3.2017 Crichton salissa Turussa.

Kirjallisessa osiossa käsitellään esiintymispelkoa sekä kysymystä siitä, miten pelon kanssa tulisi toimia. Tämä aihe koskee kaikkia esiintyviä taiteilijoita. Opinnäytetyön päätavoitteena on lisätä tietoutta tästä ongelmasta niille muusikoille, jotka kärsivät tästä pelosta. Kirjallisessa opinnäytetyössä selitetään esiintymispelkoa aiheuttavia syitä sekä sitä, miten pelon kanssa voi tulla toimeen.

ASIASANAT:

Ahdistus, esiintymispelko, ramppikuume.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The music performers communicate through music with the audience. Performing in front of audience, which is a part of musicians' profession, may make musicians anxious.

Even the experienced music performers can feel anxiety and it is common for everyone, from students to professional musicians.

Limited level of anxiety is normal for musicians and it can also help to bring a better performance. When the stress becomes extreme, it can cause disorder in performance.

Stage Fright, in other words, Performance Anxiety is a human reaction. It is important to understand what stage fright is, so that musicians can deal with the anxiety.

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2 STAGE FRIGHT

2.1 What is Stage Fright?

Many musicians have experienced the feeling of nervous at a certain level. Performing in front of audience at the stage or the need to play music scores perfectly are the main reasons to cause stage fright. It is believed that anxiety is felt stronger especially by classical music performers. Musician who improvise like jazz musicians don't seem to be so effected.

Inger Murray who is also author of "Get rid of Stage Fright and Performance Anxiety" describes that "Stage fright is often based on a negative inner dialogue where the performer's thoughts are focused on all the things that can go wrong,...." (Murray, 2014, *Mental training for musicians.com*)

"Primarily concerns worry about what others think and fear of being negatively judged." specifies, Tracy Dempsey, **Performance Coach** (Dempsey, 11, 2016, *Helpmusicians.org.uk*)

As we can focus on one or two items at a time, we want to get to point where we focus on communicating with the audience through music.

As Murray also emphases "Negative thought prevent focusing on the music, and drain considerable energy." adding that "Many very talented performers have been forced to give up their careers because of mental block." (Murray, 2014, Stage fright, *Mental training for musicians.com*, Inger Murray the book "Get rid of Stage Fright and Performance Anxiety") Most musicians don't like to speak out their problems with stage fright. Jordan Smith, in his article about the famous performers suffering from stage fright, states that one of the most well-known performer's is Vladimir Horowitz. "The talented pianist could dazzle audience with his abilities, but ultimately his stage fright led him to retire from performing." (Smith, J. Feb 13, 2015, *cmuse.com*)

2.2 What are the symptoms of stage fright

It is important to understand what causes stage fright, what are symptoms connected to stage fright and increase awareness on the issue.

Stage fright is the result of thinking of the performance situation as a threat. It is important for the performer to recognize their own anxiety symptoms in order to control them.

Symptoms of performance anxiety vary, but most are pretty familiar. There are many researches carried out to introduce the symptoms of stage fright.

Inger Murray in explaining the symptoms connected to stage fright emphasizes that the stress condition could also influence our daily life in the way of : (Murray, 2014, Stage fright *musicians.com*, and the book *"Get rid of Stage Fright and Performance Anxiety"*)

"Problems with concentration,

Over sensitivity for noise,

Forgetfulness/poor memory

Insomnia, Nightmares,

Flashbacks in similar situations,

Avoidance of situations that could remind you of past traumatic experiences,

Depression, Low self-esteem"

Tracy Dempsey, categorizes the symptoms of performance anxiety to be "Physiological, Cognitive and Behavioral". (Dempsey, Oct 11, 2016, *Helpmusicians.org.uk*)

Physiological Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms	Cognitive Symptoms
increased heart rate, sweating, to tense muscles, trembling hands, lips and knees, distorted vision and rapid and even shallow breathing These occurs when the body releases adrenaline into the blood stream, activating the	tense/anxious, facial expressions, tense/nervous bodily movements, performance errors, poor sleep and self-medication through alcohol and other drugs.	negative thoughts about the performance ("I'm going to mess this up") it's consequences ("people won't come back"), oneself ("I'm useless"), and others's opinions ("people will think I'm a terrible musician").

sympathetic nervous system responsible for the fight or flight response we need dangerous situations.		These can create a vicious circle, when they affect performance and thereby strengthen negative beliefs.
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Picture 1. Symptoms of Performance Anxiety: Physiological, Cognitive and Behavioral (2)

According to Gerald Klickstein by taking steps to understand the causes of stage fright and acquire the countermeasures, we can become more capable performers. (Klickstein, G.2009, Oxford University press, *TheMusiciansWay.com*) Klickstein sums up the performance anxiety into three main roots;

1. Personal Causes: A person's nature,
2. Task Related Causes : The task at the hand,
3. Situational Causes : The performance situation

Person	Task	Situation
Our personalities and beliefs strongly affect our experiences on stage. <i>General anxiousness</i> <i>Fear of evaluation</i> <i>History of stage nerves</i> <i>Shyness</i> Self-assured people who view performing as a rewarding challenge are generally less jittery. Our performance histories then multiply our natural tendencies.	Difficult tasks are more stressful to perform than easy ones" <i>Over challenging repertoire</i> <i>Insufficient practice</i> <i>Weak practice skills</i> <i>Lack of performance skills</i> Klickstein adds two important factors that affect our security are our practice and performance skills. Students who don't practice deeply but	The greater our concern for the outcome of a performance, the greater the potential for stress and anxiety. <i>Difficult circumstance</i> Heating failing, weak lighting <i>Public scrutiny</i> <i>High degree of concern</i> Auditions, recording, <i>Poor self care</i> Pre concert rest, diet.

	depend on automated types of learning will feel their control drain away under pressure.	

Picture 2. Causes of Performance Anxiety: Person, Task and Situation (4)

(The Musician's Way. P 140-141, Klickstein, G. Jan 15, 2012 MusiciansWay.com)

1. **“Person** Our personalities and beliefs strongly affect our experiences on stage. **The good news is that, with well-directed effort, even long-anxious musicians can replace negative thoughts and experience with positive ones.”**

Klickstein suggests that performers consider and even list which personal qualities and past experiences enhance or interfere with their ability to perform.

2. **“Task** Difficult tasks are more stressful to perform than easy ones” Klickstein adds

Again Klickstein suggests that performer makes a note of the task-related actions taken that ‘have supported’ or ‘undermined’ their success on stage.

Supportive actions include selecting manageable music and practicing it regularly, conversely, opting for arduous music and avoiding deep practice undermine security.

3. **“Situation** The greater our concern for the outcome of a performance, the greater the potential for stress and anxiety.”

Again Klickstein suggests that performers recall performance situations that have enhanced their creativity and ones that have fueled their nerves. (Klickstein, G. 2009, The Musician's Way, Oxford University press, TheMusiciansWay.com)

We can also grade stage fright into 3 phase to explain when does it occur :

Stage Fright Before the Performance	Stage Fright During the Performance	Stage Fright After the Performance
<p>Anxiety is felt in relation to performance the future, thinking of the performance situation as a threat.</p> <p>Negative inner dialogue where the performer's thoughts are focused on all the things that can go wrong <i>Idea of performing in front of audience,</i> <i>The thought of not being able display their musical talent in front of the audience</i> <i>Anxiety of the idea of performing and need to play each solo perfectly,</i> <i>Worry about what others think and fear of being negatively judged,</i> <i>Worry about your reputation being completely ruined if you perform poorly,</i></p> <p>The thought of preparation period not being inefficient, <i>Limited time to prepare,</i> <i>Motivation,</i> <i>Task,</i> <i>Learning techniques,</i> <i>Nor being able to cope with anxiety during preparation,</i></p>	<p>In result of thinking of the performance situation as a threat, performer suffers from stage fright, our bod are under the perception that we are in danger.</p> <p>If the stage fright is not controlled at all or not controlled at a certain level <i>Shaking/trembling hands,</i> <i>Stiff muscles,</i> <i>Heart palpitations,</i> <i>Shortness of breath/shallow breathing,</i> <i>Poor concentration,</i> <i>Inevitable to focus,</i> <i>Anxiety for making mistakes,</i> <i>Inability to perform to your full passages,</i> <i>Panic attacks,</i> <i>Memory loss, Mental block,</i> <i>Flash-backs of past negative experiences.</i> <i>And even having to abandon your performance are some of the symptoms that may occur</i></p> <p>If the stage fright is controlled at a certain level <i>Joyful, artistic performance,</i></p>	<p>Stress condition can influence our daily life and next performance.</p> <p>If the previous performance results were unfavorable <i>Anxiety for next performance will increase. If stage freight is triggered by a particularly bad experience, it becomes just that bit harder.</i> <i>Problems with concentration, and over sensitivity for noise, nightmares, depression are other symptoms to be expected,</i></p> <p>If the previous performance results were positive <i>Increased motivation and creativity for next performance,</i> <i>Increase the possibilities of successful performances in the future can be expected.</i></p>

<p>Environment</p> <p><i>The size of the audience,</i></p> <p><i>The specifications of the place where you will perform,</i></p> <p>The evaluation of the body whether there is a threat of not, which may lead to anxiety before performance</p>	<p><i>It can heighten our senses and our reflexes insuring we do our best,</i></p> <p><i>High performance, and display all of musical talent, technical ability and musicality in front of the audience</i></p>	
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Picture 3. When does Stage Fright Occur : Before, During and After Performance

3 HOW TO DEAL WITH STAGE FRIGHT

Dealing with stage fright is a common issue, for this reason increasing the awareness among performers and even the families of young performers is very important I believe.

Many students and their parents don't know how to deal with stage fright, during their music education period. Learning how to deal with it will prevent more performers from suffering and even applying to medicals.

"Performance anxiety takes patient effort to reverse anxious habits, especially long held ones, and replace them with secure knowledge and skill." explains Gerald Klickstein (Klickstein,G.2009,The Musician's Way page-146, Oxford University press, *TheMusiciansWay.com*)

3.1 Recommendations, Strategies & Techniques

"It is possible to work with our anxiety. It is matter of learning what lies behind it and work with the negative thought patterns so that the strong energy that is connected to anxiety can be canalized into music and strengthen our performance, creativity and self-confidence." says Inger Murray.

According to Inger Murray, **Mental Training** can help you to overcome problems and achieve full potential, in the way of , (*Stage fright, Inger Murray, Mental training for musicians.com*)

- ✓ Learning techniques to eliminate thought patterns,
- ✓ Understanding of the nature and origin of anxiety and how to channel its energy into performance,
- ✓ Techniques to help stay focused, centered and access energy at exact time needed,
- ✓ How to achieve a peak performance,
- ✓ Work on self-confidence, grounding and breathing,
- ✓ Structuring of practice- technically and mentally
- ✓ Work on meditation, visualization and energy flow,
- ✓ The more we open our awareness to the unusual sensations of performance anxiety, the less afraid we are to observe and actually feel those sensations. The more we get to know them the less frightening they become, and the more we bring to enjoy the performance.

There are plenty of recommended ways to deal with stage fright, one of them is given below :

- **Think Positively**

- When you become nervous before performance, remind yourself of the talent you possess.
- Reflect on memories that make you happy, including previous performances.
- Imagine an excited audience ready to applaud your skills and remind yourself that your skills are there to count the number of mistakes you make.
- By taking comfort in positive thoughts, you'll gain confidence to aid you on stage

- **Don't Dwell**

- If you make a mistake, don't dwell on it.
- Your frustration may cause you to make more errors, leading to greater stress.

- **Prepare Properly**

- Routine creates familiarity and familiarity brings comfort.
- So, establish rituals that put you at ease before you go on stage, and that makes you feel comfortable, whether they include
- A slow-breathing exercise,
- Mingling with audience members or Taking a walk.
- Proper preparation also includes
- Plenty of practice,
- Getting enough sleep, and
- Staying healthy in order to have the energy for a successful performance.

- **Go to the Tape (Recording)**

- Another way to prepare for a performance is to record yourself. One of the best ways to judge your progress, the act of recording might make you nervous enough to realize what areas of technique might fail in a performance.
- Once you have identified problem areas, try to find solutions or devote extra time to them in practice.

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- **Start Small**

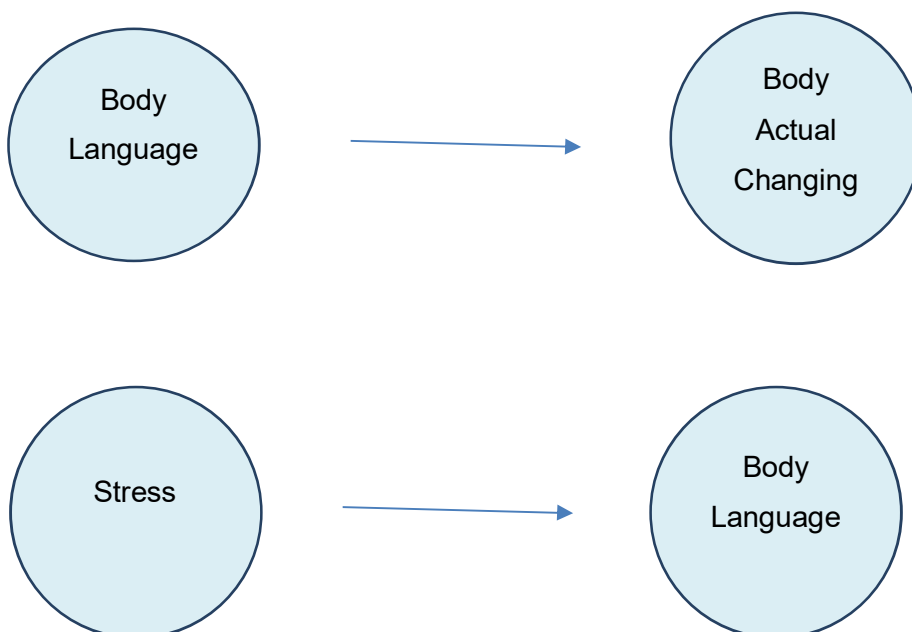
- If you're lucky enough to have been asked to perform for a large audience, and especially if you're new to performing, nerves will be inevitable.
- Dip your toes into the water by playing at small, friendly venues first, such as an open mike night at a coffee shop or as a guest player in a larger group.

Picture 4. 5 Easy Ways to Overcome Stage Fright (5)

(August 24, 2015, *makingmusicmag.com*)

Amy Cuddy, Social Psychologist, researches on **Body Language** and explains that our body language not only governs how other people think and feel about ourselves, in some evidence it also governs how we think and feel about ourselves. (Amy Cuddy, *TED Talks, TEDglobal 2012, Ted.com* The secret of body language, Leo Widrich, April 18, 2013, *Blog.bufferup.com*)

She explains that inside our body actual changes are happening as our body language changes. If you pretend to be powerful its is likely that you feel powerful. Our bodies can change our minds, our minds can change our behavior, and our behavior changes our outcome".



Picture 5. How Body Language can make actual changes on our body and behavior (6)

Amy Cuddy explained that we can change our body chemistry, by changing our body posture. Cuddy defines two main body postures. High-Power Poses and Low-Power Poses.

Amy Cuddy suggests to practice High-Power Poses for 2-3 minutes before a performance.

Deep breathing techniques is a relaxation technique that assures more oxygen gets to the brain, which in result slows down our breathing rate and makes it more regular.

Angelica Frey brings attention to breathing techniques and suggest to **Breath Diaphragmatically!** She explains that in order to perform you need breath and since you need to breath calmly, you need to breathe diaphragmatically. She also shares a youtube link showing the technique. (Frey, **Cmuse.org**)

When students are first beginning performing, they need to be helped to learn breathing and how it can help to focus and calm down. Parents should also be aware of it.

Jordan Smith, in his article about the famous performers suffering from stage fright, brings attention to violinist Tom Eisner explanations in the Guardian. Tom Eisner pointed out that “it was a great help to him in overcoming his stage fright to realize that he was not alone”. Smith emphasizes the importance to know that there are some famous figures from past and present who have also fought the same battle in trying to cope with anxiety. (Smith, J. *Feb 13, 2015. cmuse.com*)

Specially young music performers, who don't know how to deal with stage fright use medicine, and the main concern is dependence on pills. According to a survey made in 2012, among German orchestras found that almost a third of musicians used medicine. (Hewett, I. *June 26, 2014, telegraph.co.uk*)

3.2 My personal observations for overcoming stage fright

The most anxiety felt moment for me is always those last few minutes before heading on stage. What I do to control those moments is,

- ✓ To calm and relax my mind and body, right before my performance, I like to look at pictures of my family, and make phone call if they are far away,
- ✓ I do some relaxation exercise, stretching my arms up, and take three deep breaths in and out,
- ✓ I remind myself that the audience is here to listen to joyful music.
- ✓ I accept that I am feeling anxious, which is normal.
- ✓ I have always benefited from increasing my sportive activities before performance, or auditions,
- ✓ I try to control my stage freight by relaxing both my body and mind,
- ✓ I keep in my mind that I have done my best, practiced well,
- ✓ I try not to think or talk negative about the performance,
- ✓ Practicing in front of the mirror has always been helpful,
- ✓ I try not to make mistake, but if I do, I know that this is not the end the world, I try not to loose my concentration,
- ✓ Getting used to the environment is important for me, I prefer to rehearse in the stage,
- ✓ Eating a few things to prevent the empty feeling of my stomach, I don't like to eat too much before performance,
- ✓ Controlling my violin before going to stage helps me feel confident,
- ✓ Controlling breath before going to stage is important, I take deep breath and count to ten, and by the time I go to stage my breathing is relaxed,
- ✓ Right before the performance at the stage I take another deep breath,
- ✓ Sometimes the ones I know in the audience helps,
- ✓ I focus on the audience as walk into the stage, which makes me feel that I am not alone, the audience is with me,
- ✓ During performance I don't focus on audience, I try to keep my focus on my music and instrument,
- ✓ I focus on the audience reaction right after the performance and I want to see how they are responding

3.3 How to make performance anxiety an asset in becoming a confident performer

According to Gerald Klickstein confident performance involves in knowledge and skills that can be learned by coping with performance anxiety. (The Musician's Way p 133)

No matter technically how well performed the anxiety of the performer may effect the audience in the way of,

- Uncomfortable stage appearance with expectation of musician to make mistake,
- Lack of transferring the musicality to the audience,

The more stage experience performers have the more they feel comfortable I believe. For this reason stage performing experience starting back from in early age is important.

Gerald Klickstein explains that musical progress depends more on practice than on talent. It is mindful and deliberate practice that most efficiently builds performance skills.

“Talent symbolizes your underlying potential, practice enables you to realize that potential.”

Explains that self listening being the central to musical excellence. According to Klickstein, Self-recording supports in the way of sharpening musicianship, heightening the efficiency and promoting objectivity of the musician while practicing. (The Musician's Way P 146-151).

Personal Strategies	Task Related Strategies	Situational Strategies
<p><i>Develop positive responses to stress</i></p> <p>Stress itself isn't a problem; it's how we react to stress that determines whether we excel or crack under pressure.</p> <p><i>Affirm meaning in performing.</i></p> <p>Performing takes conviction. We need to believe in the power of music and our ability to perform.</p> <p><i>Refine your self-evaluation skills.</i></p> <p>Accurate evaluation not only leads to artistic and technical improvement, it also impact your anxiety level.</p>	<p><i>Choose accessible repertoire.</i></p> <p>Easy music leaves us with the inner capacity we need to focus in performance, counteract jitters, and build confidence.</p> <p><i>Acquire comprehensive practice skills.</i></p> <p>When we learn music deeply, your awareness creates a framework that's resistant to pressure.</p> <p><i>Govern your practice schedule</i></p> <p><i>Reinforce performance habits</i></p>	<p><i>Acclimate to performance settings.</i></p> <p>Alien situations can be tension-provoking. Practicing in diverse performance environments, can help getting accustomed to concert environments where we perform.</p> <p><i>Build up presentation skills.</i></p> <p>Practice performance provide ideal opportunities for us to become adept with stage.</p> <p><i>Learn performance enhancing techniques.</i></p> <p>When the pressure is on, it's natural for to feel a surge of</p>

<i>Safeguard your health</i> Music making calls for mental, physical and emotional power.	Performance skills become habitual only through steady practice, which is why it's essential that we emphasize habits of excellence whenever we perform.	adrenaline. Techniques such as 2 to 1 breathing and mental imaging, help inoculate us to situational pressures. <i>Get organized</i> , concerts, recording calls for extensive planning.
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Picture 6. Strategies to deal with Stage Fright : Personal, Task Related and Situational (4)

Explains mindful learning, stating that automated learning requires automated recall, which readily breaks down under stress. Whereas a musician who have practiced, absorbing its structure in detail could devote themselves to making art. According to Klickstein, what distinguishes **mindful performers**, is that they operate from a place of awareness and never run on autopilot. On stage, their mindful habits enable them to trust in their preparation, provided that their preparation is truly thorough.

Thorough performance preparation spans three categories, here are some examples:

Person	Task	Situation
Mindful performers learn to regulate their emotions, they monitor their inner states and rally themselves into practice or performance mode.	They attain the inclusive skills needed to execute securely in high-stakes conditions.	They rehearse dealing with diverse performance setting so that they can focus regardless of the circumstances.

Picture 7. Performance Preparation: Person, Task and Situation (Klickstein, G. Oct 2, 2012 MusiciansWay.com).

Mindful performers also stay open to discovering new things, which feeds their drive to practice. And when they work mindfully, regardless of whether they win medals, performers go forward knowing that they're doing their best.

"I feel like I learn something new about myself and about swimming and just about life in general every time I do it".

Erin R, recommends to create an "Exposure therapy" determining small steps to take to get used to performing. Exposure ladders are a technique used widely by the medical psychiatric community to treat generalized anxiety, panic disorders, and phobias of all types.

An exposure ladder is a list of activities that lead you gradually to a big goal, which activities ranked from least to most anxiety-provoking. An individual will work up the steps of the ladder, moving on the next step with little or no anxiety. An example beginning from imagining performance to the big goal is given below. (Erin R., *October 22, 2015*, The ultimate guide to overcome stage fright, *Service Scout Inc.*).

GOAL

5.....

4. Perform for a supportive partner

3. Record yourself performing

2. Perform alone

1. Imagine yourself performing

Picture 8. Exposure Therapy - Exposure Ladder

According to Robert H Woody, **Just being aware of our thought processes into a performance can be beneficial**. Sharing the study of two researchers (research carried by & miller 2010) with college students in music, who are asked to complete “dairy” entries before 15 performances during a school year. For each entry, always done within an hour before performing, they described their thoughts and feelings heading into their performance. Woody explains that over the course of the 15 performances, there was a significant decrease in performance anxiety reported by the music students and even some **basic self-awareness can have a therapeutic effect**. (Woody, R. H. *March 8, 2012, Taking Stock Before Taking the Stage, Psychologytoday.com*)

4 CONCLUSION

You must play for the love of music. Perfect technique is not as important as making music from heart. Mstislav Rostropovich, cellist and conductor. (The Musician's Way p. 133)

Music is about the sharing of expression with others, it is essential part of human being.

In perfect performing case the great musicians will be on stage, and the audience realizes how naturally the music seems to flow from them. Unfortunately, this may not be the case in most of performances.

We would love to take the stage with clear minds and to walk off the stage absolutely satisfied with what we had done.

Stage fright is a feeling which you are feeling nervous while you are performing. It is very common for everyone from students to professional musicians. Most musicians do not like to speak out their problems with stage fright. However, people whose career require them to take the stage including all musicians, in the field of performing are likely to have or experience stage fright.

Anxiety which starts with the performers thought of perfectionism, is normal healthy experience but the dose has to be considered.

There are both positive and negative sides of feeling anxiety while, performers suffering from this anxiety has to turn it to excitement. Those feelings are so close that are almost of same, with the difference that anxiety is negative and excitement is positive and really helpful if you are a showman. It will keep you sharp, focused and ready for anything.

Every musician feels anxiety at their own personal situation, so each performer has to find their anxiety cures in 3 steps basically:

- Finding their own symptoms (physiological, behavioral and cognitive)
- Then finding in which case or where especially they have stage fright or anxiety
- After finding and understanding the problems then need to find solutions according to their problems

We should take every opportunity to deepen our self-awareness and learn new coping strategies which suits best for ourselves, keep trying new techniques, and keep making music.

The performance anxiety symptom that every individual musician experiences and how to manage it, is an varied and different as the musicians themselves, and managing it is an essential part of being happy and fulfilled musician. However, people whose career require them to take the "stage" including all artists in the field of performing arts such as musicians, actors, dancers, and also others such as speakers, are also likely to experience stage fright as part of their activity.

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APPENDIX 1

DUO - THESIS CONCERT (Ilayda Zeynep Köksal – Cinar Yazgan)

Pe 24.2.2017 klo 17.00

Chrichton – salissa

Jean-Marie Leclair	Sonata for 2 Violin nr. 6
S. Prokofiev	Sonata for 2 Violin C major
D. Milhaud	Sonata for 2 Violins and Piano op.15
E. Salmenhaara	'And Fire and Roses are one'
D. Shostakovich	5 piece for 2 Violin

Pianisti: Lacrimioara Galagan

TERVETULOA!

APPENDIX 2

Recording of the Thesis Concert is situated in Turku University of Applied Sciences
Library of Music Academy, Linnankatu 60